

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Robert Hudson exhibition at Patricia Sweetow Gallery charms a heavy metal heart

April 6, 2010 by [Maureen Davidson](#)

A few hundred pounds of gnarled, rusting, sledgehammered cast iron moves—or seems to—in smooth asymmetrical spirals around a similarly decimated core. The sculptures of Robert Hudson are magnetic in their density and complex in their contrasts between the rusted iron and the smooth, fluid, gleaming enamel surfaces that may be broken but are still purposeful—concave gestures in primary colors. Many of Robert Hudson’s heavy metal sculptures actually do balance atop a single point of cold steel, turning in impossible precision like a fat man pirouetting gracefully across a stage. At the Patricia Sweetow Gallery in the 77 Geary Building just yards away from Union Square in San Francisco, the exhibition of the work of Robert Hudson brought gladness to my heavy metal heart.

In “Signature” (2009) Hudson’s light touch with iron, cold and stainless steel is at its apex, wherein the shards of cast iron that remain from old tubs, sinks and other metal of former function are gathered in a loose centrifugal relationship outside an airy core from which clean steel rods arise in a grid structure at one side, balanced by the brightly enameled cast architectural filigree which rises from the other. It’s like a transmitter of crazy news from a lost scavenger culture. This is one of Hudson’s pieces that actually does twirl atop a narrow point, and it’s one that I find especially moving. The outside fragments curl around the core in almost gestural horizontal directions/lines/trails that combine to create the feeling of a spiral. I’m fascinated by Hudson’s ability to weld disparate materials, his gloppy tacks mostly undisguised and part of the overall texture.

A half dozen drawings on paper confirm Hudson’s ongoing interest in the spiral form. These drawings provide rich background for the eight sculptures in the show, which mostly date from 2009/10. Patricia Sweetow Gallery is one of my favorite galleries in San Francisco, consistently exhibiting artists with an original take on traditional media. This is the artist’s first Bay Area show in 19 years, though he shows regularly in LA and Chicago, The very helpful Gallery Assistant Susan Chen told me about the artist’s Marin County studio---I imagine a massive warehouse-like building and forklift assisting in securing fragments of great weight while the artist welds these impossible forms.

Robert Hudson at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 77 Geary Street (Mezzanine), San Francisco, continues through May 15.